Twitter Thread by Tears at La Bombonera ■

Tears at La Bombonera ■
@BomboneraTears

Ahead of Boca-River tonight, a LONG READ thread on River Plate's 2010/11 season: How did a massive club and institution like Club Atlético River Plate get relegated from Argentina's top tier in June 2011?

■■ #longread (3,000 words)

This thread is based on the fantastic When We Were Kings podcast with the blessing of its creators @ErikNiva & @andreassonhakan. Because the podcast is in Swedish, I wanted to translate the story and share it in English. https://t.co/Sja6JdCkXB

Disclaimer: this is NOT a dig at River Plate. My book's title/front cover overwhelmingly suggest that it's exclusively about Boca Juniors - that's not the case. I'm 100% neutral when it comes to Argentinian fútbol. This thread is not written to antagonise River fans!

June 2008. River Plate win the Clausura 2007/08 title (a 19-game half season) with Diego Cholo Simeone as manager. It's their 35th league title! River's attacking players: Radamel Falcao, Alexis Sánchez, Ariel Ortega, Sebastián Abreu, Diego Buonanotte, amongst others.



10/08/2008: The story of River Plate's relegation in June 2011 starts on 10th August 2008! River Plate draw 1-1 away to Colón de Santa Fe on the opening day of the Apertura 2008/09 - it would be a bad campaign:
P19: W2/D8/L9. Cholo Simeone resigns after 1 win in first 14 games

From first place after 19 games in the first half of 2008, River Plate finish bottom of 20 teams in the second half of 2008 (the Apertura 08/09). They don't get relegated because of EL SYSTEMA DE PROMEDIOS: a relegation system devised to protect Argentina's biggest teams.

In 1982, River Plate faced relegation. For context: River Plate are HUGE. Comparing River or Boca Juniors to Man Utd/Real Madrid/Juventus is arguably insufficient.

The league format was changed in 1982 so that relegation is calculated over 3 FULL SEASONS (6x 19-game campaigns).

An average points sum over 114 games (3x Apertura, 3x Clausura) sees teams ranked by a relegation points total, un promedio.

Example from 2019/20 Premier League season: Bournemouth got 34 points from 38 games. Over 3 seasons their promedio would be: 102 pts / 114 games = 0.895

The Apertura '08/09 had gone badly but the Clausura '08/09 went a bit better: 8th place, P19: W7/D6/L6. Overall for 2008/09: 15th place/20. River Plate could afford one poor season but they couldn't afford two or more.

In the 2008/09 relegation table River lay in 6th.

Off the pitch things weren't going much better. José María Aguilar had been voted president in 2001. A 39-year old lawyer, Aguilar was seen as the fresh, young hope: incorruptible and willing to take the fight to AFA and Grondona and everything that was wrong with Argentina.

He had been seen as honest but Aguilar soon became part of the establishment: he'd regularly travel to Switzerland to visit FIFA. He ballooned and grew that big second chin all football administrators seem to have. His and his wife's bank accounts in Luxembourg also ballooned.



Under Aguilar, River Plate were chronically mismanaged. Example 1: the club rented 4 tractors for AR$25k/month when buying 1 outright cost AR$50k! They then sacked the 4 groundsmen and hired an agronomic consultant for much more than the groundsmen had been paid together.

Example 2: food/drink at El Monumental was managed by a company who paid AR$33k/year for the contract YET food/drink sales at River Plate AND Argentina's selección matches totalled AR$30k PER GAME.

River Plate got AR$33k/year instead of potentially 30x AR$30k!

Example 3: El Monumental's 130m² electronic scoreboard was replaced with a new 32m² screen from the US. People loved the original which had been used at 1978 World Cup.

Worse was that 0% of the income from advertisements shown on the screen went to the Club Atlético River Plate.

Example 4: a maintenance company hired to paint walls at the stadium was handed the ownership rights of a first team player as payment for their labour. Turns out the company's director was a relation of a club director.

River Plate got 0% of that player's transfer fee.

Ex. 5: Other player sales. A lot of players left for Europe. Villarreal bought up the rights of SIX River Plate players for €6m!

Even sports broadcaster TyC owned 40% of River's Patricio Toranzo. How does that affect their coverage and analysis of the player and his team?



Triangulaciónes/third-party ownership. To avoid paying taxes on player sales between Country A & B, it benefitted everyone involved (clubs/agents/directors/maintenance companies) to go via Country C where taxes were much lower (e.g., Chile, Uruguay, Switzerland).

Gonzalo Higuaín was not sold directly to Real Madrid in 2007. River Plate sold "El Pipita" to FC Locarno in the Swiss second division for US$6m. Three days later FC Locarno sold Higuaín to Real for US$18m.

(FC Locarno were owned by HAZ Football Worldwide Ltd.)



HAZ = Argentines Fernando Hidalgo & Gustavo Arribas plus Israeli Pini Zahavi.

River Plate ended up getting US$10.4m for Higuaín: US$6m initially plus a % of the transfer to Real Madrid. FC Locarno/HAZ made US$10.5m from the transfers.

Locarno are now in Switzerland's 6th tier.

As a result of this transfer, River Plate's main BARRA BRAVA - Los Borrachos del Tablón (“drunkards of the terrace”) - visited the house of one an HAZ adviser demanding their cut of the Higuaín deal.

“US$50k, please.”

Fans are called HINCHAS. https://t.co/bdGD2jiiSV

BARRA BRAVAS are not fans as such. They're not hooligans or ultras, either. They are mafia leveraging power at all Argentinian football clubs. Songs and atmosphere, yes, but also drugs, weapons, violence and death.

> HINCHAR (verb) = to inflate
> HINCHA (noun) = supporter https://t.co/AwlUF9fnRS
>
> — Tears at La Bombonera \U0001f49a (@BomboneraTears) December 8, 2020

Barra bravas come from all strata of ARG society: from the poorest villas to the upper-class barrios where I lived/worked between 2013-2019. RE CHETO VISTE.

There is a lot of money in football: a lot of it is more accessible in Argentina (+ other cripplingly corrupt countries).

The barra brava have power: they decide when the game starts. If Los Borrachos aren't in place for the 7pm KO, the game wouldn’t start. With their own songs, they make a big show of their entrance heading for their reserved spot in the middle of the terrace.



The barra naturally are in bed with club directors. Free tickets to sell on the street, subsidised travel and meat & booze paid for by the club for their pre-match asados.

But River Plate went much further by giving jobs to the most senior of Los Borrachos del Tablón.

River provided them jobs as security, caretakers (not the morbid kind), admin, even as youth coaches! Those members of Los Borrachos del Tablón who were being investigated by the Argentinian authorities for murder and other crimes were put in charge of security at El Monumental.

Los Borrachos' leader in the '90s Luisito ‘the newsagent’ Pereyra was given a coaching role at River Plate. In 1996 his barra beat an Independiente fan to death. No.181 in NGO @SalvemoslFutbol's register of football-related deaths: Christian Rousoulis. https://t.co/jvQvYoEruy

When Luisito was arrested for Rousoulis’ murder in the mid-2000s, River Plate couldn’t deny that they had given the leader of Argentina's most feared barra a job: their website listed him as a coach in their "baby fútbol" setup.

With Luisito gone from Los Borrachos, an internal power struggle commenced. Battles were waged:
11/02/2007: Batalla de los Quinchos https://t.co/M55vwmHPsN
06/05/07: Batalla del Playón (pics below)
23/03/08: Batalla del Fortín (Vélez Sarsfield's stadium)
https://t.co/Nvlo1zyfDa



In August 2007 there was a gangland-style hit. Gonzalo Acro was the right-hand man to Adrian Roussou, leader of one of the factions within Los Borrachos. Acro (29) was attacked leaving a gym by five masked men who shot him in the legs so he couldn't flee. He was then executed.

In December 2009 Daniel 'El Kaiser' Passarella (River Plate legend and 2x World Cup winner with ■■) became president. Born & raised a Boca Juniors fan, as a teenager he actively went to sign for River when Boca turned him away.

El Kaiser's kids grew up as fanáticos de River.

When Passarella's 19-year old son Sebastián died in a car crash, Argentina manager Daniel vowed to return to River Plate in honour of his son. He wrote on a napkin that he'd manage River Plate again and then become their president. The prophecy came true.



Back to the football.
Apertura 2009/10: 14th place (P19 W5/D6/L8).
Clausura '09/10: 13th place (W6/D4/L9).
2009/10 Apertura+Clausura: 15th place.

River Plate finished the season with a 5-1 home loss to Tigre (5-0 at half-time). https://t.co/Wh5ZrSPU7v @Transfermarkt

Teams can afford to have one, maybe two bad 19-game campaigns. The memory of (and points from) the Clausura 2008 title win were fading. ■

And the Argentinian legend of “el fantasma de la B” started to worry River fans: the so-called Ghost of the B’s presence was growing. ■



■ A quote from my book: "The ghost of relegation is a sinister presence. It threatens to kill a club’s status as a top division team and drag them into the underworld of the lower divisions. If a club has a bad start to the season, the ghost’s presence grows. No team is safe..."

10/05/2009: I was in Buenos Aires at the end of a modest two-month backpacking trip with a school friend. We went to a half-empty El Monumental to see 5th-placed River draw 1-1 with Lanús: one of those inconvenient draws when fighting the Ghost of the B. https://t.co/l6qI5SD1Do



In 2009 Marcelo "el Muñeco" Gallardo, Ariel "el Burrito" Ortega and Matías "el Pelado" Almeyda all returned to River Plate.

El Pelado (the bald one) Almeyda had only played 54 minutes of football in 4 years. For Henning Berg’s @Lyn1896FK in Oslo ■■ in 2007.



Almeyda had had a tough 4 years fighting depression. It wasn't until one day his daughter was asked to draw her dad for a school project: Sofía drew an old, tired, ill-looking lion. He started going to therapy, vowing to return to help River Plate after 13 years away in ■■/■■/■■

A River fan: "I've seen 50 players who are better.
More talented, more dangerous in front of goal, more spectacular. Greater winners, more elegant. More charismatic. More intelligent. All of them have made me happier but I haven't loved anyone of them more than Matías Almeyda."

After two consecutive 15th-placed finishes in 2008/09 and 2009/10, River Plate had slipped to 12th place in the three-season relegation table. The Clausura 2007/08 title was still helping them stay afloat, but for how much longer?!

Into 2010/11. A few Argentine players returned from Europe to help River: goalkeeper Juan Pablo Carrizo (River 2005-08) on loan from Lazio. Walter Acevedo from Ukrainian Metalist. Leandro Caruso on loan from Udinese. And Mariano Pavone on loan from Betis.

River also had:
17 y/o Manuel Lanzini
19 y/o Roberto Pereyra
18 y/o Erik Lamela.

Have you seen this @TransWorldSport video of a 12-year Lamela? https://t.co/fDiD27d5eO The next Maradona! River Plate turned down Lionel Messi but considered Lamela an equal alternative.

Apertura 2010/11: Ángel Cappa manager. Started well, first six games: 4W, 1D, 1L. After Matías Almeyda suffered an injury River went on a bad run: from the next 13 games: W4/D6/L3.

Cappa replaced by JJ López after matchday 13, a 1-0 loss at Club Atlético All Boys.

The new manager Juan José Lopez had been a legendary player playing > 400 games for River Plate.

1st Nov. 1981 River Plate drew 2-2 with Boca Juniors. After 6 mins JJ López's scored from 45 yards. https://t.co/7VpIPrrFv3

Diego Maradona scored twice that day ■■■■

JJ López's first game in charge was versus Boca Juniors, a team he had spent one season playing for after 11 years at River. Fans weren't happy with his defection.

But they won the superclásico of Nov. 2010 1-0 with a goal from another former Boca player Jonatan Maidana.



River Plate finished 4th in the 2010/11 Apertura. World Cup 2006 winner Mauro Camoranesi was available & wanted to play in ■■, but River felt they didn't need him.

In April 2011 they scored this goal at Quilmes after 25 passes and 62 seconds of possession https://t.co/UHnhzQ881m

Quilmes (A) was game 27 of 38 in 2010/11: River were going well and el fantasma de la B's presence was fading away. ■■

However, in the last 5 weeks of the season River won 0 of their last 7 games: W0/D6/L3. A 2-0 loss at La Bombonera was particularly hard to swallow.

At La Bombonera in May 2010, River Plate felt they should've had 11 (ELEVEN) penalties. Judge for yourselves https://t.co/1O9uHpBtxy

River Plate are nicknamed LAS GALLINAS■ after bottling the 1966 Copa Libertadores final against Peñarol. (2-0 up in the deciding game, lost 4-2.)

Next game: Banfield (A). Home fans threw a live chicken onto the pitch, a diagonal red stripe across its chest. The nickname stuck.

Final game of the 2010/11 season. River must beat Lanús and hope Olimpo don't win away at Quilmes. Olimpo score after 8 minutes and win 1-0.

Lanús win 2-1 in El Monumental. It's all too much to take for some: in the stands a 72-year old River Plate fan dies of a heart attack.

In none of the previous 3 seasons had River Plate finished in the bottom 4.
2008/09: 15th/20
2009/10: 15th/20
2010/11: 6th/20!

But over 114 games, River finished 17th out of 20 in the "relegation table". The system devised to save them in 1982 condemned them to a playoff game.

Pos.	Equipo	Promedio	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	Total	PJ
01.º	Vélez Sarsfield	1,833	66	61	82	209	114
02.º	Lanús	1,736	75	60	63	198	114
03.º	Estudiantes (LP)	1,728	57	71	69	197	114
04.º	Banfield	1,456	46	73	47	166	114
05.º	Argentinos Juniors	1,447	38	73	54	165	114
06.º	Godoy Cruz	1,447	49	53	63	165	114
07.º	Newell's Old Boys	1,429	52	69	42	163	114
08.º	San Lorenzo	1,421	63	52	47	162	114
09.º	Boca Juniors	1,412	61	47	53	161	114
10.º	Colón	1,394	57	55	47	159	114
11.º	All Boys	1,342	–	–	51	51	38
12.º	Independiente	1,315	39	68	43	150	114
13.º	Racing Club	1,315	52	46	52	150	114
14.º	Arsenal	1,307	46	46	57	149	114
15.º	Olimpo	1,263	–	–	48	48	38
15.º	Tigre	1,263	62	32	50	144	114
17.º	River Plate	1,236	41	43	57	141	114
18.º	Gimnasia y Esgrima (LP)[n. 1]	1,096	55	37	33	125	114
19.º	Huracán[n. 1]	1,096	58	37	30	125	114
20.º	Quilmes	1,026	–	–	39	39	38

Last chance saloon: River, 17th in the Primera, had to play Belgrano, 4th in Nacional B, in a two-legged promotion/relegation playoff.

Passarella pushed JJ López aside taking control of the team. Buonanotte sold to Málaga and doesn't want to risk getting injured so he sits out.

LA PROMOCIÓN, 1st leg: 22/06/2011. Passarella brings in a slew of youngsters. Belgrano beat River Plate 2-0 in Córdoba. River barras storm the pitch demanding that the players PONER HUEVO, lit: “lay an egg”, but also eggs = testicles ■ https://t.co/22Vu2apPXJ

River Plate fan ‘El Tano’ Pasman watched this game from his spare bedroom in Buenos Aires. 13m views! El Tano went viral before “going viral” was even a thing. I watch this video on average once a month: it’s a good Spanish lesson! https://t.co/gLR2Z5cDV0

https://t.co/KBkd72CAcP

26/06/2011: Four days after the loss in Córdoba, it was time for the 2nd leg in El Monumental. No away goals and if the tie ends a draw, River Plate survive (another mechanism to protect the biggest clubs!).

“MATAR O MORIR”: KILL OR DIE is the message from the fans.



Belgrano score after 3 minutes! But it’s disallowed. Phew ■River Plate score 2 mins later, 1-0! MARIANO PAVONE! Surely it will go River’s way now? But wait: HOW IS THIS NOT A PENALTY?! https://t.co/zSqb0YKA34 “Attempted murder” according to @andreassonhakan on WWWK

@luismmira at @goal reported that referee Sergio Pezzotta had been confronted at HT when barra from Los Borrachos del Tablón broke into his changing room threatening to kill him if he didn’t give River Plate a penalty in the second half. https://t.co/Y7sFM0CWDG

River Plate ARE awarded a penalty in the second half, but by now the scoreline is 1-1. Belgrano equalised in the 61st min. River now need two goals. 8 minutes later: PENALTY TO RIVER! (Blatant dive). Mariano Pavone steps up… SAVED by former River Plate ‘keeper Juan Carlos Olave.

Finally time for Atilio Costa Febre’s (in)famous commentary. 85th min, 1-1: “I became a commentator to report beautiful stories about River Plate, to talk about championships, to get hot under the collar in bad times. But NEVER to report on such sad moments as this one."

Atilio Costa Febre on @radiomitre, 26/06/2011 https://t.co/JG5P8zahfK

TRANSCRIPT translated by yours truly (with a little help from @robertocoll88)

Atilio Costa Febre: "River, they've killed you...

"Here there is love, fellas. Let's not do harm to each other. It's not worth it. And yes, we have to cry. The worst thing that those who robbed River will have is the condemnation of the people. They won't be prisoners but they won't be able to walk around freely in any *barrio* of the Argentine Republic.

They'll have to leave Argentina. I don't want to a civil war, fellas. Not here amongst ourselves, amongst the people of La Sivori (stand). It's obviously over. 1,000 police officers are on the pitch.

It's the saddest moment in history. It's the moment when if Angelito (Labruna) open an eye he would die again immediately. When Leopoldo (Bard), who did everything out of love for River, died again. I fear for the health of Amadeo (Carrizo) and Beto's. I fear for all of you. I ask for forgiveness. Belgrano fans and players are celebrating.

The damage they've done to you, River. They've ruined you. How can three people ruin the health, heart and soul of 14 million fans?

It's kicking off in the stands. Some are trying to lynch a childhood friend of former president Aguilar. Play stops on 90 mins. And never restarts. El Monumental is burning. https://t.co/IzmROywuEn with @MartinaSotoPose reporting, fleeing for safety in the toilets.

Police officers antagonise River Plate fans by drawing an imaginary (yellow) bar across their chests symbolising that they are Boca Juniors fans, i.e., "We are enjoying this."

Outside El Monumental the atmosphere is even more tense. 60 shops and hundreds of cars are destroyed.

90 people are injured, of which 35 are police. Rumours go around that a policeman has been killed. The TV reports it as fact but it wasn't accurate. The chaos intensifies. Outside El Monumental it is a war zone.

River Plate's Hiroshima.

Once the smoke had settled, the fact remained, the impossible had happened: Club Atlético River Plate were relegated. In the days & weeks after there were suicides and attempted suicides, death by broken heart as well as death threats to those deemed responsible for the tragedy.

Legendary 'keeper Amadeo Carrizo - record appearance holder - found himself host to dozens of River fans who had flocked to his house in search of consolation. This 85 year old became ■■'s most important psychotherapist in the country with the most psychotherapists per capita!

A season in the B.

2011/12: River Plate won the Primera Nacional B ■

P38: W20/D13/L5. Promotion! 1st place only 1 point ahead of 2nd-placed Quilmes (and only 3 points from 3rd place and another promotion/relegation play-off to go up).

Amongst the top scorers in Nacional B that season: one Paulo Dybala with 17 goals for Instituto and an Argentina-born Frenchman by the name of David Trézéguet with 13 goals for River Plate!

PHOENIX. Since their return to the top table of ■■ & South American football, River Plate have done rather well.

Inicial (formerly Apertura) 2012/13: 17th place (P19: W5/D6/L8)

Final (formerly Clausura): 1st place! ■ P19: W11/D4/L4 - 5 points ahead of Boca Juniors in 2nd.

Other titles since River Plate's promotion from La B in 2012:
■■2x Copa Libertadores (2015, 2018)
■1x Copa Sudamericana (2014)
■■■3x Copa Argentina ('16, '17, '19)

Plus a handful of other titles, their gravitas can be discussed…

ANY QUESTIONS?

This was a pleasure to translate. A labour of love ♥■.

All credit to @ErikNiva and @AndreassonHakan of When We Were Kings podcast. Listen to the episode if only to hear Swedish which I think is a beautiful language https://t.co/Sja6JdCkXB

If you enjoyed the content and style of this thread, you may well be interested in my forthcoming football travelogue which includes many similar stories from across the South American continent. The book is available to pre-order now (release date: 1st March 2021).

CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT TO EXPLAIN: RiBer.
From the book: "River Plate graffiti all over the city was altered, a simple red letter B drawn over the V, with tens of thousands subsequently offended."
V & B in Spanish essentially the same sound, indistinguishable: V corta, B larga


RIBER
JA
LUCAS